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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000739

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [ASEC](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: YOUTH TRY TO REGROUP TO ORGANIZE CIVIL MOVEMENT

REF: A. CONAKRY 0520
[1](#)B. CONAKRY 0525
[1](#)C. CONAKRY 0538
[1](#)D. CONAKRY 0565
[1](#)E. CONAKRY 0568
[1](#)F. CONAKRY 0588
[1](#)G. CONAKRY 0620

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY. After failing to organize a mass youth movement in September and then turning to military elements to plot a coup d'etat, a local youth leader says he is now back to bringing youths together to force President Conte out of office. Contact expressed concerns that the military may not be willing to cede power to a civilian government after seizing it by force. Although still working with the military, contact is now looking to gather at least 5000 youth supporters before the end of the year in order to launch a peaceful, civil movement in January. A mass youth movement could be a potent political mechanism for change, but persistent divisions among various players may be difficult to overcome. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (S) Local youth leader Thierno Balde met with Poloff on December 5 to discuss recent progress towards achieving his agenda for a peaceful political transition. Balde had initially met with Poloff in September when he was working with a core group of youth leaders to organize a peaceful movement to force President Conte out of office. When the movement fell apart due to ethnic divisions and other tensions, Thierno turned to the military and started collaborating on a coup plot. Returning to Guinea after completing a master's degree at Stanford University a few years ago, Thierno has been a very active player in Guinean civil society. He is currently working on a Ph.D in law from Columbia University. He has tried to cultivate close ties with the U.S. Embassy, and meets regularly with both Poloff and the DATT.

[1](#)3. (S) Thierno told Poloff that he and other youth leaders are increasingly worried about the military, and concerned that potential coup leaders may not be willing to cede power once they seize it. As such, Thierno said that he is trying to regroup and once again bring youth actors together for a peaceful, civil movement.

[1](#)4. (S) Acknowledging that his strategy failed the first time around, he said that ethnic manipulations are the biggest threat to a cohesive movement. At the same time, Thierno seemed optimistic about his ability to overcome this challenge. "We have to make everyone understand from the beginning what it is we are trying to do," he said, adding "we will tell everyone to go ahead and take whatever money is offered and then use it to advance our own objectives." Thierno commented that the unions were able to successfully organize a mass movement in 2007 despite ethnic issues and clear differences of opinion between union leaders Dr.

Ibrahima Fofana and Sera Rabiattou Diallo. "We have to pull people together in the same way," he said.

15. (S) Thierno claimed to be in contact with a prominent, unnamed youth leader in Kankan (Upper Guinea) who had already mobilized 200 youths eager to support a peaceful movement. Thierno said that he and other Conakry-based youth leaders are actively recruiting supporters in the capital area with the goal of gathering more than 5,000 youths before the end of the year. He emphasized that his strategy is fundamentally different this time around in that they do not plan to have a core group of leaders like they did the last time. According to Thierno, singling out specific youths as the core leaders facilitated ethnic manipulations by outside political actors. "We will all be on an equal playing field this time, so even if we lose a few supporters, it won't mean that we lose big groups of people," he said.

16. (S) When asked on what premise the group plans to organize, Thierno said that the movement will launch with a general demand for better job opportunities, reduced corruption, and the creation of a youth employment fund to be managed by youths. Thierno said that the government will not be able to meet the youths' demands, which will give the group the momentum needed to stage demonstrations. According to Thierno, the movement would eventually force President Conte to resign.

17. (S) Thierno emphasized that the movement is intended to be peaceful. He likened it to the recent protests in Thailand that shut down the airport in Bangkok. "We will either do something like that, a quiet sit-in, or call for a

CONAKRY 00000739 002 OF 002

ville morte (where everyone would stay home)," he said.

18. (S) Poloff asked about the possibility of military or police intervention to restore order. Thierno said that he remains in touch with various military elements and is trying to convince them to hold off on any coup attempts in the immediate term. He said that "some are willing to intervene on our behalf once the movement starts," adding, "it will be much easier for them to justify their actions if a grassroots movement has already started." Thierno said he is still considering options, but plans to either pursue this line of reasoning, or ask the military to simply refrain from reacting at all.

COMMENT

19. (S) Thierno seems to have come full circle in his strategic thinking, essentially coming back to where he started by trying to organize a mass civil movement of youths in order to force the current government out. He is clearly wary of the military and no longer certain that a military coup would bring optimal results, although he still seems to see some kind of military intervention as a viable option.

110. (S) Thierno's approach appeared more balanced and realistic, although perhaps idealistic, as opposed to his more zealous fervor just a few months ago. He still wants to play a big role, but he seems to lack the type of leadership qualities that tend to bring people together, such as charisma, which means that he will still have to convince other prominent youth leaders to join his team if he wants to attract big numbers of followers. Ethnicity remains a major divisive element that he has been unable to successfully address to date. A mass youth movement for political change is certainly within the realm of possibility, but it is as yet unclear whether Thierno is capable of pulling one together. END COMMENT.
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